THEOSOPHICAL RESEARCH

BY

P. D. AND L. J. BENDIT

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IT IS NOW some thirty years since the English Section of the Theosophical Society established its Research Centre. Hitherto there had been no more or less popular interest in this line of work, research into the inner meaning of things being thought to be beyond the powers of ordinary members. Only a very few, and those endowed with special powers, were held to be able to delve deeply enough into the unseen worlds to produce anything worth while.

Here, however, was a new departure: a group in which any member with sufficient expertness in any field, such as medicine or science, or the arts, could work side by side with others to try and link the ordinary knowledge of wordly thought with the intuitively apprehended sense of what they learned from their studies in Theosophy.

For many years, this English group was the principal one, but, especially since the last war, many people have become interested and would like to take part in research. However, when they face the problem, they have little idea of how to set about it. Some indeed are opposed to the whole idea. Have we not, they say, books which touch on every aspect of life and creation? And do these not bear the stamp of spiritual authority? In

short, is there anything left to investigate? To these it can be said that what the books say is doubtless basically true, but that there is a distinction between two aspects of Theosophical thought. One aspect is concerned with basic principles which are expressed in our books as clearly as language permits, as well as existing in the more transcendental levels of our minds. The other, however, has to do with what we call facts, and it is here that research begins, though there is also much that can be done to amplify and explain the statement of principles already in our hands.

This is because Theosophy is not a closed system of thought. It derives from two sources. One is the deep and enduring intuitions of many seers and visionaries of all time. The other belongs to the moment of time at which any expression of the timeless truths is being made. Theosophy can therefore best be defined as the expression *in time* of things that belong to the realms *beyond time* : a human statement of divine truths. But, while the basic principles endure, the expression of them must change as time passes, consciousness develops and evolution progresses. Hence the constant need for fresh search and fresh statement.

Further, the basic "classics" of modern Theosophical writing give us a wide framework, covering many aspects of the universe. The authors, however, remind us constantly that they are not infallible and that what they say is not necessarily correct. Moreover, they do not give us a solid

structure so much as a network within the meshes of which there is space. It is this space that the research worker can fill in, and in doing so perhaps put right any errors which have crept into the original texts.

What is of enduring value in our literature is, in short, principles rather than facts. Indeed, much of the difficulty found by modern students when faced with the older classical books is that they find some of the factual material incorrect in the light of modern knowledge. The discrepancies which appear are often obstacles to the beginner's perception of underlying principles. Principles endure because they are not of time. What we call facts are in reality "constructs," to use the modern term, of our minds. They are related to the realities of the universe but they are not the whole of that reality, a large proportion of the fact being contributed by the mind of the student. Their accuracy will depend on (*a*) his perceptivity, sensory and extra-sensory or "psychic" (*b*) his memories, associations and previous knowledge, (*c*) his intuitive sense of how that which he perceives fits into a wholeness. Thus, as the perceiving mind changes, so does the picture of reality which we call a fact also change. No more obvious example of this can be found than in the field of chemistry. Here the fact of the atomic structure of matter, in which the atom was held to be indestructible was replaced first by a new fact: that it was a small version of a solar system, with electrons as

planets, circling round a nuclear sun. This is now dethroned by a view based on wave mechanics, probability, and a blessed lack of certainty. It is just the same with "occult" facts.

Put differently, principles belong to the realm of the "higher" mind, or Manas functioning through the time-spacelessness of Buddhic vision. Facts belong to the realm of "lower" mind, or Manas associated with space-time, and are linked not with Buddhi but with the conservatism of Kama or instinct.

The work of the research student is to bring both fields together, the immutable world of principles being integrated with the ever-changing realm of factual knowledge. This integration is brought about by the correct use of the pure principle of Manas, the central core of manifested man, which lies between the two fields of its activity in Buddhi and Kama. Manas is like the pivot of a compass needle, one half of this needle being Buddhi, the other Kama. The pivot is the operative point, and that at which all awareness rises.

When the two functions are properly fused, Manas works with its roots firmly in the world of eternal principles, but slides easily over the mutable assembly of facts, not holding on to them by force of habit and instinct, but allowing them to flow past in a steadily changing panorama. To achieve this fusion the mind can draw from two main sources of information :

1. Modern knowledge in all fields. This, as we have said, is constantly moving.

2. The principles of the Perennial Philosophy as expressed in Theosophical books. These endure despite the fact that their language is subject to the wear and tear of time.

The words "integration" or "synthesis" both mean a bringing together. But this bringing together needs to be something more than an attempt to reconcile things that are in reality contradictory. If one only tries to explain away contradictions, to gloss over differences, the whole process never rises above the lower mental level. It is an effort of ingenuity to see how things can be made to fit when they do not. This is another matter altogether from "synthesizing the pairs of opposites" in such a way that contradictions, while they still exist, become part of a whole. This they only become when the range of mental apprehension is lifted to a new level where a larger piece of the universal pattern is seen. The first kind of worker is like a man who tries to prove that night and day are the same and not opposites. The latter accepts them as opposites but understands them as aspects of a single process due to rotation of the earth on its axis—which means that he has a wider view of them than before. This wider view, evidently, belongs to a higher level of mental function than the first. It is nearer to universal principle yet does not in any way veil the known fact that night follows day and day follows night,

one being light, the other dark. It is a step nearer the higher mental level and adds something of the illumined consciousness of Buddhi to a mind already overweighted with desire or Kama. *This is research.*

It may now be asked in what way research differs from ordinary serious study. There is really no dividing line between them. Indeed, all real study is of the nature of research and involves the same human principles as in any field where creative work is done.

If we consider the source of the material we wish to study, we have books which are Theosophical (in the widest sense), deriving from the intuitive mind, the "archetypal levels" of C. G. Jung. They have scriptural value insofar as they touch on eternal principles. The other source, the material world, is that of facts, of science, of all work that goes on in the many spheres where action occurs, the realm of Kama-Manas, the "lower" mind. Thus we have a field provided for us and coming from outside ourselves, within which the individual can work.

It follows that, whether we call it study or research, the work of bringing together the temporal knowledge of practical affairs with the intuition that lies *behind* rather than *in* the books of the Wisdom, is a piece of work creative in two directions. Inside the man it helps the development of his mind towards its own perfection as a pure, unconditioned, all-sensitive organ of direct perception

such as the Master K.H. speaks of in one of the Letters, while others, including Mr. J. Krishnamurti and certain spiritual philosophers echo the same idea. Outside, it adds to the sum of expressions of human wisdom, from which others can benefit.

It is, therefore, within the reach of every Theosophist to do research. Indeed, Theosophy must involve research so as to bring about the development of a creative mind: else it is not Theosophy. To take part in it does not call for a great intellect. Indeed, many brilliant intellects are quite incapable of creative research, the vast knowledge they have constantly standing in the way of deeper understanding. But the individual must be intelligent: that is, capable of disentangling his thinking from the morass of preconception and emotion in which most people live. He needs to be objective, if only within the field of the subject he is studying; and anybody should be able to learn that.

In practice, few can work alone because it is so easy to let oneself be led astray by personal bias and prejudice. It is in group work, such as the Society provides, that there is safety, and research is best done—as it is in the laboratories—in a team. We know comparatively little of the technique of group work, though some has been done both from the Theosophical angle and that of social psychology; yet it is undoubtedly the method of the future. (Indeed, it might be suggested that a study of the technique of how to work together so that true creation takes place might itself be a

piece of research in which even the technically unskilled could take part.)

An objection often raised by would-be research students is the difficulty of finding a good clairvoyant. It is true that clairvoyance, in some forms of research, is a very valuable asset. Without it one could not investigate at first hand the structure of the atom or of the physical body. But there is a much wider field in which it is not needed. In just the same way a scientist may find a microscope essential for a particular study, but useless in many other realms. It does not help, for instance, in the study of psychological matters, in trying to discover the basic principles of education, in considering art, symbolism, the spiritual aspect of government, and in many more fields all of which lend themselves to research.

In any case, clairvoyance can be a hindrance if it is not really reliable and entirely objective. Few people, even if they are definitely clairvoyant, are capable of the accuracy needed. This may make what they report highly deceptive, all the more so if there is a small grain of such truth as is known to science in what they say. In practice, too, different seers may observe facts quite differently yet equally accurately because they perceive only part of an event, and that at different levels. Differences of background, temperament, previous knowledge and many other personal factors further complicate the picture. So at best, a clairvoyant report, even if it fits and explains known facts

should never be given the status of being true for all time.

Other means of discovery are open to us on a much wider scale. They have the advantage of needing none of the special training required by the clairvoyant—a training often extending over many lives. The mind of any of us is a far greater and more powerful instrument than we imagine. We know only what it can do and not do in the field of physical waking consciousness; but it works also behind the scenes without our necessarily being aware of what it is doing. In this it is very much like an electronic brain or a calculating machine. If one feeds one of these with certain data, asks it certain questions, after a longer or shorter interval an answer is presented to consciousness. The inside of the machine, the unconscious levels of the mind, have been at work on the problem. If we can learn to be receptive and open to what the inner mind tells us, many difficult and seemingly insoluble problems become clear and obvious.

This technique of trusting the unconscious, is very much used in ordinary research, though some would deny the fact, and it can be applied just as well in the Theosophical field. One has to learn how to ask the right questions in the right way. In other words, the research worker has to discover how to state the problem he wants answered. In our field one side of the problem may come from our reading. This alone may raise questions

which, when answered, may carry us a long way beyond what we have read. But if we add to this the fruits of study, not only of viewpoints we agree with, but also of others with which we may disagree yet which we listen to with a receptive mind, then leave the whole matter to inner mental working, things begin to happen. It is as if we fed the mind with a mixture of food and left it to be digested. Eventually the useless material is discarded, while the useful becomes welded into a new and enlarged view which answers the original question.

The dangers of this method should not be denied, for if a person or a group start off on a faulty premise, distortion may increase and the result may be a fantastic and unreal system of ideas. But two corrective factors are at hand. One is the personal intuition of each individual. In English, people say that a true idea "rings a bell" in them, whereas another, equally plausible, does not. The "bell" is the higher mental intuition, which we need to learn to use.

The most drastic corrective, however, lies in sharing ideas with other individuals or with another group. But the communication of ideas has to be done without any wish to persuade others that one is right. It has to be a matter of laying something open to them for consideration, as if one said: "I (or we) have been thinking along certain lines. Please help in finding whether the reasoning is sound, and if not, let us discover where

it is wrong." Many important discoverers work in this way. Einstein, having intuited the principle of relativity, then asked help in proving whether he was right, while Charles Darwin carefully noted every point brought before him which cast doubt on the evolutionary principle. It can be said at once that the dogmatist, the person who is out to convert others to his own view-point is inevitably both uncertain of himself and incapable of creative research: his mind is not open and sensitive.

So research is a matter within the reach of many of us. Nobody would be attracted to the Theosophical Society unless there were already in him a germination of the "higher" mind. The value of his membership is to help him foster that germ and to make it grow strong and dominant in his personal life. General study of Theosophical principles is of great value if it is carried out in the spirit of research, but specialized knowledge in a particular field of ordinary life brings further incentive and richness to this study. It is for this reason, as well as because it is so possible, and no mere reaching for something beyond one, that it would be good if much more were done under the guise of positive research rather than just studying what has already been said by others.

It would be good if each Section set up its research group—perhaps several groups—of specialists. If the techniques and principles of research became known and spread by practice, these could

eventually filter into every Lodge. Here, in turn, new creative life would flow, until that Lodge became a place of ever-increasing understanding of the deeper aspects of life. In his Lodge, too, every member could *learn how to learn* for himself. In this way the Society would be immensely strengthened and reinvigorated, to the benefit not only of its members, but also of the thought atmosphere of the world as a whole.

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